



## Connecticut

### *Holding Power Accountable*

Testimony to the Government Administration and Elections Committee

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Chairwoman Senator Flexer, Chairman Representative Fox, Vice-chairs Haskell and Thomas, Ranking Members Sampson and Cofrancesco and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee, my name is Cheri Quickmire. I am the Executive Director of Common Cause in Connecticut. Common Cause is a nonpartisan, non-profit citizens' lobby that has worked to improve the way Connecticut's government operates since 1971. We have 1.5 million members nationwide and more than 15,000 members and activists in Connecticut. Common Cause in Connecticut has a long history of working to increase transparency in government and advocating for the removal of the corrosive influence of special interest money in government and politics and election reform.

I want to thank you for this opportunity to testify before the GAE committee on these important bills. We support the following proposals:

**H.B. 5872 An Act Expanding Automatic Application for Voter Registration to Certain State Agencies**

**S.B. No. 640 An Act Concerning Online Platforms and Campaign Finance**

**S.B. No. 761 An Act Permitting the Use of Citizens' Election Program Grant Funds to Offset a Participating Candidate's Child Care Costs.**

**H.B. 5651 AAC Absentee Ballots for Certain Detained Individuals**

**HB 5872 An Act Expanding Automatic Application for Voter Registration to Certain State Agencies**

This is an extremely significant bill that is based on the assertion that all eligible citizens should be registered to vote unless they decline. This will ensure that eligible citizens are automatically and electronically registered to vote unless they opt out. Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) should be available to eligible citizens when interacting with state agencies and programs in addition to the Dept. of Motor Vehicles, including the Dept. of Social Services, HUSKY, Access Health CT, state colleges & universities and other agencies that make available voter registration information.

Overall, this reform will save taxpayer money and make the system even more efficient. AVR will enhance the security and integrity of our elections, eliminating outdated address and duplicative registrations through an automatic process, delivering accurate voter rolls to cities and towns. This improved data management will significantly reduce the strain for local election officials and possible confusion on election day. In addition, this bill codifies AVR as it exists today with the MOU with the DMV and the Secretary of the State's office. We agree that this should be expanded to register even more voters.

Automatic voter registration (AVR) has emerged as a promising 21st-century innovation to reduce registration errors, which can lead to problems at the polls and often serve as a barrier to participation. By making voter registration an integral part of government services, AVR offers states an opportunity to create a modern, secure, efficient and accurate voter information system that promotes voter participation. This system is built on the crucial assertion that all eligible citizens should be registered to vote by default unless they decline. Nineteen states have versions of AVR.

### **S.B. No. 640 An Act Concerning Online Platforms and Campaign Finance**

This bill will require online platforms such as Google and Facebook to make publicly available copies of electioneering communications and contact information at the platform for their messages. It is critical to be able to discern that the communication is not an independent expenditure if displayed during the ninety days prior to a primary or election.

We are moving to an increasingly digital world of elections and campaigning with escalating misinformation and disinformation that purports to be legitimate campaign messaging. It is difficult for voters to be able to evaluate candidates and their messages in this climate. This requires us to be vigilant about transparency and accountability and to set parameters that not only protect the ability of the candidate to share their legitimate platform but protect from mis and disinformation. We believe that it is not only the responsibility of the candidate and campaign who are placing online messages to be transparent but also that the online platforms themselves must disclose who is placing the messaging.

We urge passage of this bill.

### **S.B. No. 761 An Act Permitting the Use of Citizens' Election Program Grant Funds to Offset a Participating Candidate's Child Care Costs.**

Common Cause supports permitting the use of Citizens' Election Program (CEP) grant funds to be used for child care costs of a participating candidate. This is a commonsense reform of the program that will make it more likely that parents of young children will be able to run for office. Thanks to the 2020 ruling of the Superior Court in favor of Caitlin Clarkson Pereira, a Fairfield Democrat who received public funds from the voluntary Citizens' Election Program, candidates running for office in Connecticut are able to use public campaign funds to reimburse child care expenses as long as they are the "direct result of campaign activity," "reasonable and customary for the services rendered" and "properly documented by the campaign." Connecticut

will benefit from additional participation of parents in all aspects of our government. We urge passage of this bill and codification of the ruling.

### **H.B. 5651 AAC Absentee Ballots for Certain Detained Individuals**

Common Cause supports removing barriers to permitting eligible voters exercise their right to vote if they are detained. Providing Absentee Ballots to individuals will help move past felony disenfranchisement laws that are antiquated and have a disgraceful past rooted in slavery and racism. These laws not only have a disproportionate impact on communities of color and low-income communities, but also have no criminal deterrent or rehabilitative value.

- In the District of Columbia, Maine and Vermont, felons never lose their right to vote, even while they are incarcerated.
- In 18 states, felons lose their voting rights only while incarcerated, and receive automatic restoration upon release.
- In 19 states, felons lose their voting rights during incarceration, and for a period of time after, typically while on parole and/or probation. Voting rights are automatically restored after this time period.<sup>i</sup>

Making Absentee Ballots available to detained individuals who are eligible to vote as outlined in HB 5651 will bring CT in line with 19 other states that currently permit incarcerated individuals to vote and build on the law passed in 2001 that went into effect in January 2002. [Public Act No. 01-11: An Act Restoring Voting Rights of Convicted Felons Who Are on Probation](#) ([www.cga.ct.gov/2001/fc/2001HB-05042-R000031-FC.htm](http://www.cga.ct.gov/2001/fc/2001HB-05042-R000031-FC.htm)) This law allowed the restoration of voting rights for Connecticut residents who have been convicted of a felony and who are on probation.

Thank you.

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<sup>i</sup> NCSL National Conference of State Legislatures, January 8, 2021